# Rainbow: clapped out?

## RAINBOW 'Difficult To Cure' (Polydor POLD 5036)**

*TWO STARS?! I hear you scream.*

*Yes, I'm afraid so. To come straight to the point and with the minimum of waffle: the days when a new Rainbow album was automatically awarded a* Sounds *'Indispensable' tag are over. Finished. Dead and gone.*

*I'm not taking this slant simply to be controversial. I'm not about to give 'Difficult To Cure' a drubbing because I feel it's an 'interesting' or 'different' angle to adopt. No, I sincerely believe that this LP is desperately disappointing, and moreover that guitarist and band leader Ritchie Blackmore has had his day.*

*I've said it. And I've started, so I'll finish . . .*

*Vocalist Graham Bonnet's and drummer Cozy Powell's departures from Rainbow heralded yet another new beginning for the band. However, despite criticisms of Mr Blackmore's continual chopping and changing of the group line-up, it's possible to argue that the multifarious Rainbow 'developments' have generally worked out for the best.*

*It's Ritchie's prerogative to mess about with his own band after all, and indeed more often than not his (initially apparently arbitrary) alterations have worked spectacularly well. Bonnet for example, despite his rather smooth appearance, was a more than worthy successor to Ronnie James Dio. Similarly, Roger Glover was a wise choice to hold down the position of bassist and Don Airey is undoubtedly the best keyboard player Rainbow have ever had.*

*But this album sees Blackmore's once unerring ability to choose the right men beginning to wane. New drummer Bobby Rondelli is less than forceful, languishing at the back of the mix and making little impact, a sorry substitute for pounding Powell power. And shrill-voiced Joe Lynn Turner has none of Bonnet's commanding vocal presence, spending far too much time apeing Foreigner's Lou Gramm for comfort.*

*The new Rainbow is not better, nor even as good as the old. For the first time, it's* worse.

*Coincidentally, Blackmore's playing seems to be suffering as well. Late on in his career, he seems content to limit himself to the 'hit singles market' rather than branch out into new areas of axepertise. In fact, his playing on 'Difficult To Cure' sounds terribly slow and dated. Apart from the odd classical take-off, the guitar tracks could conceivably have been recorded around Deep Purple's 'Machine Head' days.*

*While the new breed of guitar hero — the likes of Eddie Van Halen, Alex Lifeson and Randy Hansen — breaks new ground it's sad, not to say tragic, that the once-masterful Blackmore has been left behind. He quite happily ploughs old furrows and steadfastly refuses to move with the times.*

*A track-by-track rundown, and matters become definitely disheartening.*

*'I Surrender': The Russ Ballard song Blackmore filched from Praying Mantis. Lord knows why the guitarist went to such great lengths to secure the number as it is, at best, a poor man's 'Hold The Line'. That said, it's nonetheless preferable to a version of the Shirelles' 'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow', once mooted as 'the next Rainbow single' and even performed at Castle Donington. But only just.*

*'Spotlight Kid': A lyrically interesting story of a stage-struck musician — 'They love you but you're in love with the spotlight'. But Blackmore's lead breaks sound hackneyed and the Cossack dancing/ELP-style mid-section is confusing and incongruous.*

*'No Release': Blackmore has never played Led Zeppelin numbers before, so why is he starting now? And once again, centre-song, Rainbow lurch off on a tangent for no apparent reason, this time into the field of gospel with Joe Lynn Turner indulging in a continuous chant of* 'Can't get no — can't get no — can't get no release'.

*'Magic': Lightweight American Top 40 material, the same criticisms apply to this number as to 'I Surrender'. Probably the follow-up 45.*

*'Vielleicht Das Nachster Zeit (Maybe Next Time)': An introspective instrumental, Blackmore's slow bluesy style would probably have been labelled 'tasteful' in the early Seventies but today just sounds time-warped. If Rik Emmett started playing this you'd shout "Rubbish!" For heaven's sake Ritchie, this* is *1981.*

*'Can't Happen Here': The words tell the tale of a blasé population's unwillingness to act in the face of imminent disaster. Unfortunately the impact of the message is lost as the song, once again, is given the supreme limp-wristed treatment. Also, the pivotal guitar riff sounds naggingly familiar.*

*'Freedom Fighter': One of the album's better tracks, something of a two-fisted epic. But Joe Lynn Turner's homogenised AOR vocals don't fit comfortably with the rough 'n' tumble subject matter. I would have enjoyed hearing Graham Bonnet sing this.*

*'Midtown Tunnel Vision': Like a track off an early Robin Trower LP. Admittedly the heaviest number on the album, but how can it work under that sort of handicap?*

*And finally 'Difficult To Cure': A disastrous instrumental, 'from a traditional work by Beethoven'. It sounds like a heavy metal Sky and ends with joke bag laughter clicking in the run-out grooves in the style of 'I Am The Beat'.*

*So Ritchie* is *joking. Of course.*

**GEOFF BARTON**

*"SHOULDN'T YOU have the stocking over your head, Ritchie?" New Rainbow drummer Bobby Rondelli in a moment of serious contemplation*

Pic: Ross Halfin

# A less than Ari session

## NEW AGE STEPPERS 'New Age Steppers' (O-Nu Sounds)*

THE NEW Age Steppers is a banner where various members of groups such as the Slits, Aswad and Creation Rebel join forces under the knob twiddling guidance of Adrian Sherwood who in his time has done the honours for Creation Rebel and Prince Far I to name but two.

The idea I presume was to produce a *dub* album, a new style dub album for people who wish to own such an artefact but are a bit put off by all the religious business that goes with it. Something they can impress the crowd with as the joint goes round, a funny effect thrown in here and there to raise a few aware eyebrows. "WOW!!! This is a really heavy slate maaaannnnn!!!" they mumble in the darkness.

It is in reality a complete pretentious bore with the whole revoltingly hip 'dread inna Ladbroke Grove' psyche crawling out of it like maggots. The only saving grace being Ari Up's vocal rendition of 'Fade Away' a song previously made famous by Junior Byles. Ari's treatment of the song is the star earner on this particular platter mainly because it is played for the most part totally straight without any of the other tracks' annoyances.

Ari's voice sounds exposed like a raw light bulb with an edge to it that is almost moving. It gets one point for honesty in both performance and arrangement. The rest of the wretched album wades and wanders like a blind man down the sewers. Although Adrian Sherwood takes a stab at all the right buttons the end result is a farcical collection of wishy washy drum patterns and electronic prattery of the worst order.

The whole project lacks imagination, humour, rhythm and soul. It's everything a dub album shouldn't be. Steppers that are falling over their own clumsy Earth Shoes, step it inna Job Centre chic, you name it. Can you smell Patchouli oil?

**EDWIN POUNCEY**

## RICHARD STRANGE 'The Phenomenal Rise Of Richard Strange' (Ze Records PVC 7917)****

THE CRAZED Doctors Of Madness inevitably split, leaving Richard Strange feeling "decidedly loopy, almost pyschotic and very frustrated". These emotions were constructively used — as in an act of remarkable audacity, Strange cast himself as central character in an involved and not totally impossible stage plot. Always modest and unassuming, the ex-doctor decided a Rock Star could become International President of the European Bloc in the next ten years!

America was the testing ground for this 'Political Musical', but the tour wasn't exactly conventional as you may expect! Equipment — just a tape machine and a pre-recorded backing track. Venues? Kansas City Opera House, Tulsa Country and Western Hall Of Fame and an expatriot Polish dance hall to name but three! 'Phenomenal Rise' was eventually recorded at New York club Hurrah's, and stands as an important landmark, both in Strange's career — and for all Futurists looking for alternatives.

This grandiose and eccentric scheme's slightly marred by one small point. The music isn't that strong or as well sculptured as the storyline suggests. Multimedia fixated Strange, his eyes firmly glued on a sign marked 1990, relies on inferences of Thirties German Kabaret and 'electric folk tunes' to transmit his message. His ideas are more suited for a synth 'Euro Beat' outfit, which could've better emphasised these provocative lyrics.

Instead, a conventional line-up from guesting players gives a decidedly aged feel to the proceedings. Another weakness is a lack of continuity, partly caused by using three different bass players over the length of the elpee. The consequent change of styles is very noticeable. As no credits are given for guitar and synth work, I presume these were Strange's doings? Kindly, they're sparse — more accurately, in this musical context, rather too simplistic and on occasion naive.

Allowing for the 'demo' quality of much of this 'live' album, some of the tracks do shine out — 'The Hero Runs Away' — being a highpoint on side one. Side two's fresh and imaginative, opened by pulsating synths and disco bass of 'International Language', which fades on hoarse breaths and screams to 'Gutter Press'. Despite an emotional delivery on this one, it doesn't actually say very much.

The theme of 'Preplay' revolves around some future video game, and features a blazing sax solo from sadly underused Dave Winthrope. His superb playing effectively masques the Pistols 'Anarchy' chord sequence in the verses!

'I Won't Run Away' — a sentimental and gloriously defiant ballad, is the one track that convinces me Strange isn't just another musician with a novel publicity angle. Stage character and live person unite, and some of the pain and determination required for such an enterprise chokes its way out of the grooves.

Here, a dark and lonely side of Strange emerges, *'I always felt I wasn't cut out to just get by — either be a beggar or a king — both these things are true of me. . .'* — moving without being sloppy. Old 'Doctors' anti-religious leanings are re-iterated in the last verse, *'I'll never put my faith in some jerk up above'.*

'Phenomenal Rise' gets four stars because Strange has proved he has the guts and energy to go out and do something dramatically different, even if the musical vehicle he's riding could have been more streamlined. His imagery and perception of our possible violent future show care, passion and ingenuity. Any man possessing these qualities with the ability to get his ideas across on vinyl deserves a serious listen. Eccentric — of course. Some of the best visionaries always are!

**VALAC VAN DER VEENE**

A SIDE: 'PLEASE DON'T TOUCH' BY HOT